

## **IBS Handbook**

Students may not enroll part-time in the core curriculum without special permission, or take BMSC 210, 211, 212 out of sequence.

Students are enrolled in the IBS for an entire calendar year. Their IBS or GW/NIH fellowship during the first year is a 12-month appointment. During the first summer they are expected to be doing class work and to be completing their third laboratory rotation (BMSC 215) and to start working in the laboratory of the mentor they have chosen for their independent research.

Any University fees incurred by a student for late action (registration, drop-add, withdrawal, etc.) shall be paid by the student and not the IBS.

### **Maintaining Good Academic Standing**

If a student obtains below a 3.0 average in any semester, on the first occasion they will receive a written letter of warning from the Columbian College of Arts and Sciences and will be required to meet with their academic advisor to remedy the situation. If the student obtains below a 3.0 average for a second semester the matter goes to the dean, who makes a decision whether the student's program should be terminated.

If a student receives a grade below a 3.0 in a required core IBS course(s), they are subject to academic probation.

If a student does not satisfactorily complete the required first year IBS requirements during the first academic year, they are subject to academic probation. This includes a grade of "Incomplete" for any core course.

Academic Probation requires a meeting of the student with the Operations Committee. Courses of action can include remediation of course work, loss of stipend and/or tuition benefits, or dismissal from the program.

If a student does not gain admission to any Ph.D. program at the beginning of their second academic year, they shall meet with the Operations Committee to determine whether they shall transfer to a Master's Program or have their program terminated.

### **Procedure for Second to Third Year Transition (does not apply to NIH Partnership Students)**

When a student enters the lab of the research mentor, the role of the IBS becomes one of facilitation rather than financial support. The mentor and student must sign agreements of intention, and the mentor must provide evidence of ability to financially support the student through the remaining period of training.

It is VERY IMPORTANT that the student realize that the IBS pays stipends in advance of the period of coverage, while as an “employee,” payment is made AFTER the work period. This means that for the period of transition from IBS to mentor’s lab, there will be an extended period (about 60 days) between paychecks!! Your last IBS paycheck will be for June and you will receive it at the beginning of June, but you will not receive your next check until the end of July.

The advisor receives notice of the recommended level of salary support (see below for current levels). Usually if the student is to be supported by a grant to the advisor on the GW campus, the student’s position is that of *research assistant*. As an employee, the student is in a “benefited position.”

Whereas tuition cannot be charged to NIH grants, as an employee of GW, the student receives an employee benefit of 96% of the cost of tuition. For US citizens, the number of credits one can take as a Ph.D. student is unlimited in number but can be used for eight semesters only. For international students, there is usually a stipulation that the student cannot work officially more than 50% of the time, and ***employee status prevails over student status***. Those students will receive a tuition benefit of 3 credits per semester and one in each summer session. If the research mentor wishes to cover the 4% of tuition not covered by employee benefits, it must be done by adjusting the student’s salary by the appropriate amount. The current tuition rate is \$1118/credit hour, so about \$45/credit hour is NOT covered by tuition benefits. The IBS is **not** responsible for the remaining amount. Also, please note that tuition is a ***taxable*** benefit.

Students who have completed the second year on an IBS stipend should have already taken 48 credits. That leaves 24 credits to be taken for the remainder of their Ph.D. training. Clearly, the student will want to space the required credits out over the time of training, so usually takes about 3 credits per semester. The student should plan with his/her program advisor for the number of credits to be taken each semester, based upon progress toward the degree. If a US citizen needs to be certified as full-time (which is considered at the nine credit per semester level) while carrying fewer than nine credits, a form can be filled out certifying full-time status stating that coursework has been completed and work is now devote toward dissertation research). International students must register for nine credits per semester to be considered full time and cannot be certified full-time while carrying fewer than that number of credits.

When the student becomes a “benefited employee,” he/she will no longer receive free admission to the Wellness Center, which he/she will have received as an IBS “student” on a stipend. If the mentor wishes to cover this expense, it amounts to about \$25/month and must be done by adjusting the student’s salary.

“Benefited status” implies that taxes and FICA are withheld. Neither the university nor the IBS gives tax advice, but as an employee taxes will be withheld from students’ paychecks and their tuition is considered a taxable item. It is up to the student to choose the withholding level by filling out a W4 form with HR. If a student feels that tax withholding is not appropriate, there is an option of “exempt” on the W4 which should be

marked. If the student does not fill out the form the university is required to enter a zero, meaning the highest amount will be withheld, and will automatically enter in “DC” as the place of residence, which has the highest withholding rate.

### **Writing and Defense of the Research Proposal**

Detailed instructions should be obtained from the Graduate Program Advisor prior to the initiation of the following procedures. Briefly, the student will prepare a written dissertation proposal and orally defend that proposal. The proposal will be modeled after an NIH predoctoral NRSA application. The student will discuss the proposal with the mentor, under whose guidance specific aims will be developed. The specific aims will be presented for approval to a Dissertation Research Committee, comprised of the mentor plus three other faculty members chosen by the student and mentor, with the approval of the Curriculum Committee. After approval of the proposal by the Dissertation Research Committee, the proposal is developed independently by the student with minimal direction from the mentor or other faculty. The completed document will be reviewed by the Dissertation Research Committee, which will meet to determine whether the proposal is acceptable. As a part of the Research proposal, the student and mentor should set milestones and a timeline to ensure steady and timely progress toward the completion of the Ph.D. degree.

The student will make revisions as deemed necessary by the committee. After the committee has approved the proposal, an oral defense will be scheduled. At the defense, the student will orally present the proposal to the committee, after which there will be a question and answer period. The committee will ask questions related directly to the proposal, or which seek to place the proposal in the larger context of the field. While this is not meant to be a comprehensive examination, some probing of the student's awareness of issues relevant to the proposed research is appropriate. If the oral examination results are acceptable to the Dissertation Research Committee, the student will be passed. If the defense is not successful, the student has one chance to retake the oral defense. If the second attempt is not successful, the student may be dismissed from the Program. The proposal defense should be completed during the third academic year. For most students, the summer following the second year of the program will be dedicated to completion of the written and oral portions of the proposal. If the Curriculum Committee finds that the student is not progressing sufficiently toward a timely completion of the proposal, the student may be required to suspend laboratory work until the proposal defense is successfully completed. Whenever appropriate, the student and mentor are strongly encouraged to submit a revised final version of the proposal as an NIH NRSA predoctoral application.

### **Monitoring of Progress throughout the Research Phase of the Ph.D. Training**

Students are required to prepare Progress Reports at six-month intervals, and present these to their Research Committee prior to a committee meeting. At these meetings, progress will be evaluated and compared to the proposed timeline, stumbling blocks

identified, and alternate strategies developed to help the student achieve his/her goals as necessary. This may include suggestion of an alternate technique to one that is not yielding results, recommending other faculty or outside scientists who might be able to assist in overcoming technical obstacles, etc. If the student has no technical problems, but is not progressing at the anticipated rate, reasons are explored and the student advised of strategies to improve progress. If at any time it appears that the student is not progressing steadily, the student may be advised that to remain in active status in the Program, certain timelines must be met. If they are not met, the student may be dismissed. If a problem arises regarding incompatibility of the student and mentor, another possible mentor may be identified.

The level of benefits depends upon whether the student is employed on a full time (most US citizens) or part time (most international students) basis. Whereas a full-time employee receives full health insurance benefit options, a part-time employee may have to contribute a larger amount to his/her insurance plan. Mentors should be mindful of this in setting a salary level so that all students receive comparable coverage.

The HR website is available and very well-organized. Please find benefits info at: <http://www.gwu.edu/employment/careersatgw/benefits>.

Please remember that **the IBS does not have a budget for tuition in the upper years of the student's training**. It is therefore critical that the students, mentors and academic advisors work closely together to ensure coverage for the student. This requires academic as well as financial planning.

### **Levels of support**

Entering students in Academic year 2009-2010 receive a stipend of \$25,000/yr. Beginning in their second year, based on appropriate academic performance, they receive an increase such that their per annum rate increases to about \$26,000. However, the IBS pays for only 10 months of the second year. As stated above, the last paycheck from the IBS is for June, paid in advance. The mentor should arrange for the student to be paid for the month of July. We recommend that the student be compensated at the level of at least \$27,000 per year. Since the student will also no longer be reimbursed for health insurance by the IBS, or be granted Wellness Center membership as a benefit of student stipended status, and tuition benefits will change depending upon how the student is now supported, all these factors should be accounted for in the level of compensation the student is given. In many cases, taxes will now be withheld from the student's check. While the IBS does not give tax advice, we would like everyone to be aware that taxes are not withheld from stipend checks and are withheld from employee checks.

### **Publishing**

We encourage you to publish research from your dissertation. Each year your publications are proudly announced in the Director's Annual Report to the Dean of the

Columbian College of Arts and Sciences. We greatly appreciate your letting us know of any work you have had accepted for publication.

It is a requirement that you acknowledge your affiliation with the IBS by including the following statement as a footnote or in the acknowledgments section of your manuscript: “X is a predoctoral student in the Y Program of the Institute for Biomedical Sciences at the George Washington University. This work is from a dissertation to be presented to the above program in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Ph.D. degree.”

### **Conflict of Commitment Policy for Students working on Industry-Sponsored Projects**

Doctoral students are free to choose their research projects in consultation with their dissertation mentors. Students are never to be *assigned* to projects sponsored by industry; their associations with industry-sponsored projects must be voluntary. Moreover, faculty who have their own consulting practices or companies must be sensitive to conflict of interest issues if they contemplate involving students voluntarily in their activities and should discuss such issues openly with the student(s).

Students must be able to discuss their work with teachers, advisors and committee members. Students must also be able to present their work at seminars that may be a component of their required curriculum, as well as in written progress reports to their Dissertation Research Committees or PhD programs as required.

Doctoral students must have the full traditional freedom to publish and present promptly all results of research. Reasonable delays will be accommodated for consideration of filing patent applications. The delay should be no more than 60 days. Delay may be extended by up to 90 days if the reasons are specifically stated in a formal agreement between the sponsor and the University.

Doctoral students are expected to be engaged in full-time research, with the exception of attending or preparing for seminar, or classes or preparing manuscripts on their own research. Regardless of the sponsorship of their work, and with the understanding that not every experiment will necessarily become a part of the dissertation, they are not to be employed excessively for technical assistance for work unrelated to their own projects.

### **Are you ready to graduate?**

Meet with your committee and obtain their permission to write. There is no formal document required. Agree on who your readers will be. You need two in addition to your mentor. For NIH Partnership students, your two mentors count as one person only. You need two additional readers.

Write your dissertation. All dissertations must now be submitted electronically. Detailed instructions are available at <http://www.gwu.edu/~etds/>. A template is provided for your

convenience. As a reminder, abstracts should be limited to 350 words or anyone ordering a paper copy in future will receive a truncated version.

I encourage students to work with mentors during the writing process. Most mentors are happy to receive sections and provide feedback as you progress. In addition, the IBS Director encourages all students to meet with her for general advice on dissertation writing and the expectations of the committee at the defense. After the mentor has seen the dissertation, distribute to your readers. The mentor and both readers must sign off on the document before it is given to the rest of the committee. The form for this is called ***“Dissertation Research Committee Sign-Off”*** and is on the advisors’ webpage. This form should be returned to the Academic Advisor BEFORE the defense is scheduled. The committee consists of the mentor (who will not participate in the questioning), the two readers, and at least two additional examiners, one of whom should not have been on the Dissertation Advisory Committee. This is to allow a person with a fresh perspective to evaluate the work. This “outside” examiner must be outside your program, and may be outside the institution. A CV of the outside examiner must be provided to the Program Director to ensure the outside person is appropriate. Give them ample time to review. Obtain the sign-off form from your Program Director. Distribute the revised (if necessary) dissertation to your whole committee. Your Program Director may also want a copy. When you distribute, you can inquire about defense dates. If the committee is willing to permit you to schedule a date before they read, you may do so. It is their prerogative, however, to have time to finish reading the dissertation before the scheduling of a defense.

When you have chosen a defense date acceptable to your committee, you must identify and schedule a chair to officiate at the defense. This should be a Program Director, Chair, or other senior faculty member.

All information for the defense should be submitted to the IBS office **at least** two weeks prior to the defense to allow time for the generation of a program. IBS staff have a template for this document; however if you do not turn it in to the IBS Office in a timely manner they may not have time to prepare and format the program – please do not submit it at the last minute! The information that they will need includes: your name, prior degrees, abstract, committee members, and a list of your publications. They can provide you with an example for reference.

A seminar should be given prior to the defense. It is best if the seminar can immediately precede the defense, but not required. Your Program Director will provide information to the IBS office for advertising the seminar. Plan on an hour for the seminar and about three hours for the defense.

At the defense, the chair should have a form indicating the results of the examination. It is called the ***“Final Examination Committee Sign-off”*** and is located on the advisors’ webpage. If revisions are required, there is also a space on the form that indicates who need to see revisions before the dissertation is accepted. Once those revisions are made, each person who wishes to see the revised version must sign off on the form entitled

***“Final Dissertation Approval.”*** Again, this is available on the advisors’ webpage. When the student gets the required signatures, the form is returned to the Program Director, who files the ***“Graduation Clearance”*** form at the Graduate School. This must be submitted by the PD and not the student.

The seminar is open to the public. The defense is open to the GWU Academic Community. Students are welcome and encouraged to attend so they can be prepared when their time comes!

Please contact your Program Director with any unanswered questions or concerns.

### **Submission of the final dissertation**

As stated above, all dissertations must now be submitted electronically. Information is available at <http://www.gwu.edu/~etds/>. Two forms are also required. The first form, called the UMI form is, submitted electronically with the dissertation. The second form is the electronic dissertation approval form. This is a paper form that must be signed by the student’s Program Director and the student, and certifies that the electronic dissertation submitted is the final, corrected version. This form must be turned in to Iva Beatty in the CCAS (Room 107 Phillips Hall) following electronic submission of the dissertation.